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# (SNP056) Cecil C. Graves interviewed by Diane Zior Wilhelm

Cecil C. Graves

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Interview with Cecil C. Graves  
Part of the Shenandoah National Park Oral History Collection, SdArch SNP-056  
(formerly SC# 4030)

Interview conducted at unknown location  
By Diane Zior Wilhelm on May 10, 1966

Transcribed by Chelsea Gutshall and Tiffany W. Cole, June 2010

Key

[DW:] Interviewer, Diane Zior Wilhelm  
[CG:] Interviewee, Cecil Graves  
[UF:] Interviewer, Unknown female (Wilhelm's student assistant)

[Notes regarding transcription technique]  
[unintelligible] Unable to understand more than one word  
\_\_\_\_\_ (??) Transcriber's best guess  
— Speaker makes abrupt change in sentence  
Refer to the Baylor University Style Guide for consistency in transcription

Total interview length: 01:01:07 min.

[Begin audio file, 00:00:02 min.]

DW: Testing, testing, testing, testing.

[tape break from 0:00:05 to 0:00:09]

[unintelligible from 0:00:09 to 0:00:26]

DW: I think that's the, that's a school at the Hoover Camp.

CG: At the Hoover camp?

DW: That Dennis Hoover...was that in the Page County...

CG: I don't know whether that was in Page County or not. I know that was down in Dark Hollow over there and I think that was...uh...I don't know whether that was in Page County or not. You know, they came up here; a whole lot of people came up here and the folks felt sorry for them [??]. And I don't know where that is. Do you know where that is?

DW: I think...let's see. They said this is the Corbin Mountain School. Down at the bottom of Corbin Hollow. This was taken in 1934...

CG: See, I came here in '36.

DW: '36.

CG: I came here in '36, yes. They must be some of the Corbin's down there, I imagine.

DW: I think this woman is Celia Corbin and I don't know who the rest of the people are. They only had her listed.

CG: I know we used to go up on the mountain and stay before the park came through there and that was when you went up over, over those roads...why, people were so anxious to see you, you know. And they wondered who you were! (laughter) And they'd

come out and sometimes, I don't know, you'd see eight or ten come out of those little houses up there.

DW: (in background) Thank you.

CG: And my grandfather, he built this, he built this, well, he had something to do with building the New Market and Gordonsville Turnpike.

DW: Oh, really?

CG: The one across the mountain, yeah.

DW: My goodness, he really...

CG: My grandfather there.

DW: Well your wife's brothers were born near Staunton, is that right?

CG: Yeah [unintelligible] close to Staunton. That's where I've been working today. We sold this place and we have to get out before July.

DW: Oh dear. Maybe...can I take your new address in case I want to write to you again or talk with you or something?

CG: Well I'll be here. If you just write me here I'll get it. I don't know.  
(laughter)

DW: But, on a...you know one thing I'm particularly interested in is the influence that school teachers had on the mountain community. Do you think...well, think about...were the school teachers locals, you know, the ones that were in the mountain schools?

CG: Well I wouldn't say that they were. No, because most of them were from away. And I don't know, they went up and they lived up in those places. They lived in places. At that time, why, you didn't, you didn't have any kind of accommodations in fact, not like they have now. You take up at Tanner's Ridge. We had a girl come here from down towards Richmond someplace and she liked these [interference on audio] dishes and everything like that.

DW: Fifty cent ones.

CG: And she had since they opened. She stayed up there and she made a good teacher. And we released her at the end of the year, I think probably before the end of the year; she got another place prepared, with considerably more money. And I don't know where I was going then, I was going someplace; I was going away. And she wanted us to release her before Christmas. Well I was leaving just about the time the holidays started and I said (??) I don't know whether we can release you before Christmas but if you'll give me just a little while after Christmas, enough to get a teacher, why we will release you then. I never wanted to stand in the way of anyone's progress or anything like that, financially or otherwise. But I often wondered why some of those girls come in from towns and everything like that. Of course you've got now, you don't run across those things up there because those people, if I may say it I don't know, I don't say it with a derogatory nature or anything like that. They've become much more enlightened and, I don't want to use the word 'civilized' because they were civilized before, but they've become much more used to outside influences, you see, and everything like that than they were at one time.

DW: How did they usually react to the school teachers? I mean, how did the people feel about education?

CG: Well most of the people up there, I don't know, they, they reacted very favorable and they were very friendly towards them. They would give school teachers just the best that they had. Of course the best that they had wasn't very much. Probably pork and beans or something like that. Cabbage. Krout that they'd made you know. They'd grown the cabbage during the summer. And some of them would have hogs. A few of them would be wild almost. They'd turn them out and the hogs would eat the acorns you know and they'd kill them around butchering time and everything like that. Some of them would and some of them didn't have any hogs.

DW: Well did they pay the school teacher then and not the school board?

CG: No the school board paid the school teacher.

DW: They just gave them presents.

CG: They just gave them anything. And they might give them [unintelligible]. They didn't have very much to give them other than the necessities of life. Now my father was the superintendent here before I was.

DW: Oh, really?

CG: And he used to ride a horse and go around and visit all the schools. One time we had about 120 schools in the county. Well when I took over in 1936, we had 36 schools I think. See the outlying schools had been done away with.

DW: Did they consolidate them?

CG: Yeah, they consolidated it and tried to get them away. And that had a good influence on those people, coming in contact with others, you might say not in the mountainous regions and everything like that. But I don't know, you probably haven't gone into that because we put on a testing program here at the time. I was doing graduate work over at the University of Virginia; that was my thesis. And they had a whole lot of these boys over there that were in school and they could do anything they wanted to. There were around about 10 or 15 of us that came over here, two different days and gave a test to the different schools. And one thing we found out that this school up here at Rattleburg, no it wasn't Rattleburg, it was some other school up there. But we found that the kids in the seventh grade up there did better than the kids in the consolidated schools.

DW: Well that's interesting.

CG: Well you had to go back, to test by itself is no good.

DW: No, that's true.

CG: Unless you make a study of it or something like that. But here's what we found out there. That those kids didn't want to come out to school outside of their own [unintelligible] you might say or the neighborhood. And rather than to come out, they dressed different, they talked different, and everything like that. And they didn't feel at home coming out. And they would rather stay in those schools and repeat for probably the fifth grade or the sixth grade or something like that. And see when they did that two or three years why they knew that the other [DW and CG talk over each other]. That was the conclusion that we came to. That was the only conclusion that we could draw or anything like that. They had to work over and over several times you see and they were more familiar with their schoolwork.

DW: Well when they came out to the consolidated schools, they didn't sleep at the schools did they?

CG: Oh no.

DW: They just came by school bus or walked?

CG: They came by school bus, yeah.

DW: Well when they were in their little small schools, they were usually in the hollows were they or on top of the mountains?

CG: Well we, do you know where Tanner's Ridge is?

DW: Yes.

CG: Well we had a school up there for a long time in the church in the mission.

DW: Oh, that's the Episcopal Mission.

CG: Deaconess Hutton was up there. And we taught in the back end of a church. And I been up there already and I don't see why they didn't preach in there. It wasn't

in the church part of it, it was back in the back part. And the doors didn't fit close together and gosh you get up there in cold weather and then you [untintelligible].

DW: We were at the Pinnacle's Ranger Station last night and we practically froze to death.

CG: Well it was cold down here last night they tell me. I was talking to some of people that were up on the ridge, a man was contracting up on the mountain was working. He's doing my kitchen cabinets and he said everything froze up on the mountain.

DW: We had 18 degrees.

CG: 18 degrees.

DW: Pretty cold (laughter).

CG: Well somebody was telling me that out there the other side of Harrisonburg, over in there by Moorefield something like that they had around about 12, 14 inches of snow, but [DW and CG talk over each other].

DW: Oh I don't think so (laughter). You know something that interests me, you always hear, you read a lot of these old books that people spoke like Elizabethan English, you know. And I was wondering, do you really think that's true? I mean after all the school teachers were going in there and I just wondered what you think of this?

CG: Well the mountain people, they kinda had a brogue of their own, and they changed from that gradually with contact with the outside and you might say that teachers going in there had something to do with changing their method of speech and their language and everything like that.

UF: Did the teachers live in the school house or did they stay with the family?

CG: No they didn't live in the school house. They generally lived with one of the patrons who tried to get them out for instance I think the one up at Tanner's Ridge I think she stayed with Deaconess Hutton.

DW: I wanna go up and talk with her too.

CG: Well you know, she's up in Pine Grove now.

DW: I heard.

CG: She's retired and she was over at the University of Virginia Hospital. She was, oh I don't know what you would call her, but she had service over there for the (?) or anybody else who wanted to come hear. She's been a wonderful woman and now she's living in a trailer up here right at Tanner's Ridge you might say or Pine Grove.

DW: I was talking to a gentleman at the newspaper office, I don't—

CG: [untintelligible]

DW: I don't remember his name

[DW and CG talk over each other, untintelligible]

DW: And he said she was a good—

CG: Uh huh. Yeah Deaconess Hutton over there now is a source of information because she was on the mountain there for a good many years. And when I was a kid why up in Pine Grove and places like that, those people were wild and woolly. And it was hardly a week passed by that somebody didn't get shot or something.

DW: It was really like that, you think?

CG: Yeah. Well now when Deaconess Hutton [untintelligible] they had a few missions. And they had a wonderful [untintelligible]. In fact Deaconess Hutton had a wonderful [untintelligible].

DW: Was she a local woman too?

CG: No she was from away I think. I don't know where she was from. But she is a most wonderful woman.

DW: Well I'm anxious to meet her. I've heard nothing but good things about her.

CG: She would sit down and be willing to talk to you. I don't know how her health is (coughing). Excuse me. We've been intending to go up there to see her, but [untintelligible] one thing and then the other.

DW: Well I know it's hard to get to do things that's why I spoke to your wife last night and I thought well I'd just ask to come tonight cause I'm not gonna never get a chance (laughter).

CG: (laughter) Well it looks like, I don't know people think when they're retired

they have plenty of time, but I don't know [unintelligible] with the Shenandoah Chairman's Board up there—.

DW: Oh my goodness.

CG: And it looks like you have more to do now than you used to.

DW: Well you know I have a little boy, two years old and I used to think, now I think what they do with my [unintelligible] all that leisure time I used to have (laughter). You never know when you're well off.

CG: Well what does your husband do in the park now?

DW: Well he's a professor of geography at McGill University.

CG: Oh McGill.

DW: In Montreal.

CG: He's not connected with the park then?

DW: Well he's a collaborator.

CG: I see.

DW: With the park service. He does some research. He was a ranger here years ago. In fact he used to live in that old cabin you know at Panorama that they knocked down when they built the new restaurant. It used to be on the other side. And he was a naturalist here for about three years. And now he's doing research. They call it collaborator; it sounds terrible. It sounds like under him. But we'll be here for about another four weeks I guess and then we're going down to the Blue Ridge Parkway and we're gonna do pretty much the same thing there. But my husband is interested in the cultural and also the biological, the animals and things. But I'm just strictly interested in the cultural. And we've been coming here on and off since about 1956.

CG: Well how long do you stay when you come?

DW: Well we used to stay all summer, but now we're only, all together be here about six weeks. I think we'll probably end up buying some place here. Every summer we say we [unintelligible] cause we really love it.

CG: Well you know, let's see. Mr. Wilkins, he's a Baptist preacher I think down here around Baltimore, some place outside of Baltimore. And his son is, I don't know, is a ministerial director or something like that I don't know, in one of the counties around here. And he was interested in buying my place; he made me promise, he bought a swimming pool up there you see or at least so they say that he had anyways. And he's aiming to develop it into a place kinda like the Pocono Mountains, you've heard of those—

DW: Oh yes, the resort.

CG: Up in Pennsylvania. And he said here some time ago he had, it's non-denominational, he's a Baptist, but he said that the organization would be non-denominational. They wouldn't care if they had one denomination, but it would strictly be non-denominational. And somebody had written him wanting to know if he would be able to take care of 800 people in the summer. Well of course he can't I don't know, but he said he was interested in my home just for the older people. Now I don't mean, I mean so that those would direct the youth and everything like that wouldn't be with them all the time. They'd have a place where they could stay at night and everything like that. I told them, "You wanted to buy the one that I didn't want to sell" (laughter).

DW: (laughter).

CG: Cause I like the country myself.

DW: We do too. We just can't wait till we get out of the city in the wintertime and get down here. Now I don't know, it's been ten years that we've been spending around here, so we'll probably end up buying some place.

CG: Well it's a good place to spend time.

DW: Oh I love it.

CG: You can't find a better place.

DW: Whenever anyone gets here in the park service, I know they always hate to leave because it's so nice.

CG: Well they do, a whole lot of people. And when they were building the drive and everything like that, some of them would transfer to Richmond and you'd hear them wail and moan and everything like that. It's like I don't know what it is around here.

DW: It's special.

CG: [unintelligible] Are you one of the students? (speaking to second person presumably accompanying DW)

UF: Yes I am.

CG: How many of them do you have, two?

DW: Well we just have two this summer. Last year there were five, but this year just the two. So I think this is, well the two girls are actually Canadian, so this is their first visit. But one girl Dean Wells (?), she has a lot of relatives in Virginia over in Norfolk, somewhere around there and in Fairfax I think too. So the girls are getting their first taste of this part of the world.

?: This is the first time I've been this far south. I've been to New York and—

CG: [unintelligible] (laughter)

DW: (laughter) Oh the northern states, they just love it down here. Well I wanted to ask a few more things here on this. You read a lot of things too in the books, like I was reading that book Hollow Folk. Have you read that?

CG: No I haven't.

DW: [unintelligible] 1936 or something. And they say that there were a lot of children that never went to school. Is that really true?

CG: Well I expect there is, there was. That's been years and years ago probably.

DW: About 1936 that book came out. They ran into a lot of children that had never gone to school. And I just wondered.

CG: Well they were back in the mountains like right far back in the remote areas and everything like that.

DW: I think they were talking about Nicholson Hollow.

CG: Now well I don't know where Nicholson Hollow is. Nicholson Hollow is over back of Ida some place or another, isn't it or not?

DW: Well yeah. It's just, well you know where Pinnacle's Ranger Station is?

CG: Yeah.

DW: Well right in between there and Skyland, if you go down on the other side it'd be right around in there.

CG: Well you see that must be in Madison County.

DW: Oh I see, the other side's in another county.

CG: Yeah the other side. The boundary line is the top of the mountain.

DW: Oh great. I always get mixed up. I just think of the mountains.

CG: My father was a Civil War engineer too and he said he's found surveying some of the land up in there that, of course there's heaps and bounds where [unintelligible] land didn't mean anything to them then. It generally ran from the top of one mountain to the top of the other. He said he had [unintelligible] his experience, he had run across a couple trees that Washington had marked when he was a [unintelligible].

DW: Really?

CG: Of course they're not standing now or anything like that. But my father was 79 when he died [unintelligible].

DW: Well that would be a thrill to see something like that wouldn't it? Goodness. Well I know, do you know Ray Shafton (?), the chief of park management?

CG: Yes.

DW: He and some people they found one of the original, they got it in the Big Meadows visitor's center now, one of the original stones, you know. I can't remember. Have you seen that [unintelligible].

CG: No.

DW: Well that's beautiful. It just opened up last week I think.

CG: Well you know it's great I don't know. Different things like that that are close around your home, why people from away see them before you do.

DW: (laughter) That's always true.

CG: Cause you take the [unintelligible]. I was born right here in the county. Of course I haven't been in the county very much since then or anything like that for a long time, but I don't know how old I was before I ever went to the caves.

DW: Well the girls, that's the first thing they said, "Well let's see the Luray Caverns" (laughter). So I guess that's true.

CG: Well now under the auspices of the cave people they figure that it's good

advertisement and everything like that. They pick out, I think it was the tenth grade they started that when I was superintendent and we would bring some transportation and we used the school buses to bring them down to the caves. And the cavern owners, they let the kids [unintelligible].

DW: Oh that was good.

UF: That's nice.

CG: And those kids get to see the cave and they go away and talk about it and it is a good way to advertise. And they would send out booklets and everything like that, to find out about the different geological foundations, formations and everything like that. Stalagmites and stalactites. Used to couldn't remember which was which by golly.

DW: Well I don't know myself. I'm not sure. I always get, I always think about how to remember, but then I never do.

CG: Well I'll tell you how you can remember, how I remember. Stalactites they come down from the top; they have to stick tight to stay up (laughter).

DW: Oh that's a good idea (laughter).

CG: It takes some little thing like that and I don't know it looks like it makes an impression and you don't get them mixed up.

DW: I always wondered why then named them so similar. It's so hard to remember.

CG: Stalagmites and stalactites.

DW: I was wondering, about how long do you think the teachers stayed generally in the mountain schools?

CG: They didn't stay so long.

DW: Just sort of come and gone.

CG: Unless you would run across somebody that would kind of use their surroundings and everything like that. We have had a teacher who used to work in Jollett Hollow and some of those places that to go back and forth [unintelligible], but simply because of their background and everything like that they just liked those people and they came from that stock of people and everything like that. They wasn't much to get and put on frills and different things like that you see and have a good time. [unintelligible] And some of them would stay a fairly length of time, but most of them didn't stay so long.

DW: Did you ever get any that would like come from a certain hollow or something and go get more education and go back and teach?

CG: Well I don't know whether we have done that or not. But I don't know Deaconess will tell you this that off of the top of Tanner's Ridge, I've forgotten what year it was, we had a girl that finished high school, the first girl in any little section that had ever finished. Gone all the way through grammar school and then through high school. She was transported into Standardsville.

DW: What year would that be?

CG: Now I couldn't tell you the year; that was some time ago. [unintelligible] 10 years and I guess 10 or 15 years before that. But it was something very unusual because those kids they, it seems like they didn't want to go to school so much. They would finish around about the fifth or sixth grade, the school that was in their neighborhood. Well then they got married or did something else?

DW: How about the subjects in school? What were they generally taught? What were the subjects in school?

CG: Well you would have reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, science and things like that.

DW: And were the books the same as they used in the Valley in the mountain schools?

CG: Oh yeah. The books were the same.

DW: Can you remember any of the names?

CG: No I don't remember any of the names especially. I don't know right now.

DW: How about the teachers, did they usually go to like normal school or regular college?

CG: Well now some of those teachers would come out of colleges would have their degree and everything like that. And some of them you see, they used to issue a certificate what they called a normal professional, two-year college work. And the collegiate was issued on a four-year college course, and then the collegiate professional was issued of four years of college work with certain work in



education you see, in theory and methods and things like that. And so our teachers as a rule were just as well prepared as the teachers in the elementary schools down in the Valley.

DW: Were they generally single women or married?

CG: No most of them were single.

DW: Were there many men teachers that back there?

CG: Yes there were some men teachers that would teach in places like that.

DW: And, let's see, there usually would there be like a one-room school where they teach all the grades?

CG: Yes. One-room school, all the grades.

DW: You don't remember [unintelligible]. Superintendent Haggard (?) said that he thought there were still some buildings standing, the one-room school houses. They had been sold to people to use for something else, but they were still up there.

CG: Yeah we sold a lot of them. Some of them were one-room schools and some of them two-room schools. And I tell you, a whole lot of those schools were built. The people, we'd buy the land from them, for instance I'm talking especially the one after we moved out of the church over where Deaconess Hutton was and we moved down this way about a mile or two. And we bought a lot and built school houses on them. But those lots were generally sold down there like they were other places that when that land ceased to be used as a school house or used for school purposes, the land would revert to the person that you bought it from, you see?

DW: Oh I see. So then they could do whatever they want with it?

CG: Yes and then another thing, they didn't want people coming right in and living right next to them or anything like that. Not that they were so close together, but they didn't want to give the land up but they would give it up for a school purpose or something like that. But we had land down in the Valley here. There was a two-room school down in Springfield which is right on this highway between here and Front Royal that was specifically stated in the deed that when that land or when that building ceased to be used as a school purpose, it reverted to the original owner. And probably the farm might have changed hands two or three times, but a person having a farm here they wouldn't want somebody else to come out and five or six hundred dollars and then have a little, a small dwelling right on the corner of their place you see? And that's the reason that was done.

DW: Well did the boys generally go longer than the girls up there [unintelligible]? They didn't have to stay in school like they do now, till they're 16?

CG: No they didn't have any. We started compulsory schools, I've forgotten what year it was. We used to have [unintelligible] here and in Shenandoah and in Stanley almost every week for people to send their kids to school.

DW: Oh really. From up in the mountains?

CG: Well not necessarily up in the mountains. But down here too.

DW: What would generally happen? Would they wind up sending their kids to school?

CG: Well some of them just didn't want to send them and they didn't see the advantage of the children having going to school. And some of them were just too darn lazy to get up and get them ready and everything and they claimed they didn't have clothes equal to somebody else and different things like that. They just had all manners of excuses.

DW: But they'd [unintelligible] send them?

CG: But they wouldn't send them. Sometimes they'd fine them and of course they couldn't pay the fine. Most of the time that class of people needs all the money that they have for the necessities of life. So the judge would give them a suspended sentence or something like that. Any way to get them to school.

DW: Do you think that's made a big difference you know having to have the children in school like that?

CG: Well I think that is made some, yeah. Because lots of times they sometimes the children would want to come to school and their parents just [unintelligible]. And we have some right in Shenandoah which is one of the towns, one of the small towns in the county that some of those children came from families where their parents, we used to have shows and different things like that and movies because a whole lot of those kids never had a chance to see a movie or anything like that. And we

would have those movies and well if they couldn't pay for it, we would just very quietly would tell them to go pick up paper on the grounds or something like that and ya'll go to the show this afternoon. It was done in a way so that they wouldn't feel that they were being given something you see and everything like that. And some of those parents didn't want their children to see a movie.

DW: Do you think from religious principles?

CG: Probably religious principles, yeah.

DW: What would most of them be that would say that?

CG: I don't know. [unintelligible] thought it was sacrilegious what to go to the movies and just wrong, that's all.

DW: I guess some people still see that.

CG: Well I guess some of them do, yeah.

DW: I hope if we're keeping you beyond some time and you have to go somewhere (laughter).

CG: Oh that's alright. I don't have anything else to do but take a bath and get on some clean clothes and eat some supper and go to bed (laughter).

DW: You must be very hungry, I don't want to keep you.

CG: No I told Mrs. Graves, "Well I would lose a meal [unintelligible] and still doesn't mind it a bit in the world."

DW: Well we all thought we'd lose so much weight this summer and now all we seem to be getting so hungry walking around we [unintelligible] (laughter).

CG: (laughter) Do ya'll do your own cooking or do you come in to Skyland or some place?

DW: No we do our own cooking. Well I generally cook dinner or supper and then everybody else helps themselves to the other meals otherwise you have to spend the whole day in the kitchen. You can't do anything else (laughter). Do you think, how about the parents? Were most of them able to read you think at least like the Bible or something like that?

CG: Well they might be now, but they used to not be able to read or anything like that. They never saw a newspaper, didn't take a newspaper. They didn't have any access to any libraries or bookmobiles or anything like that. They'd just grown up that way and they just [unintelligible].

DW: So do you think they really were as isolated as some of these old books say?

CG: Now I think some of that is exaggerated and everything like that. You know there used to be a lot of publicity in regard to a whole lot of those people and some of these people they might have been social (?) where they wanted to elevate those people. They'd come up and see one family that was very low down and everything like that. I mean their living conditions and everything like that were very poor. And then they'd go back as if the whole county was that way or the whole section was that way. Well that wasn't, they had all they wanted to eat and enough clothes to wear and different things like that. They would grow, it's true they didn't have a varied diet or anything like that. They would, the land was rich, they could grow potatoes and cabbage and they didn't have very many staple groceries or things like that.

DW: But they could get into town occasionally and buy—

CG: Well they could get into town if they walked, I don't know. That's about the only way that some of them could get out from up there would be to walk.

DW: Well you know sometimes when you read some of these old things like they say they came in, and in three weeks they did this study. And I think sometimes, I get the impression that they asked people questions and people might have said "No" when the answer was really "Yes" just because they didn't know these other people. You know what I mean? Like they said something that a lot of people never heard of the American flag and things like this. Do you think this is true up there?

CG: Well it might have been years ago, but I don't think—

DW: 1936

CG: I don't think that prevails now or anything like that. [unintelligible] Although they probably joke about this one old man who was coming from Madison I believe over in Virginia. And he was coming over to see some of his kin people and he got on top of the mountain which is the dividing line between the two counties, took off his hat and waved it and says "Goodbye Virginia." (laughter) He thought

he was [unintelligible] So those people they were good people, good solid, substantial people. They didn't care much about voting or anything like that. But if they knew you, they'd give you the very best they had.

DW: I've read that in some of the things.

CG: Now whether it was something to eat or anything like that, why they would give you the best they had. It might have not been so much or anything like that. And my daddy when he was going around he used to ride a sorrel horse around and visit all of those schools. He'd try to see them all once a year. He had around about 120, 116 way back at that time.

DW: What years would those be that he was superintending?

CG: Oh gosh, I don't remember. I get old so fast that I don't know. I'd have to count back on my fingers. (laughter)

DW: Well, once they had a school in operation, did they keep it going all the time or would they have to stop it while and maybe till they got another teacher or something.

CG: Well most of the time they kept those things going. Sometimes they couldn't get teachers to go back in those [unintelligible] places. [unintelligible] they didn't have any school. And a whole lot of times, way back a long time ago, not even at schools up in the mountains, but some of the schools down at the base of the mountains you might say, they only had around about forty-five (?) schools.

DW: Oh I was interested in this. That would be it for the year. What months would it go?

CG: Well it would, in my day they generally had the school when it was bad and the kids couldn't get out to work or anything like that, and most of the time it was too bad to go to school. (laughter)

DW: (laughter) I bet the kids were happy about that. But how about the day, about what time would school start in the day? Nine o'clock in the morning?

CG: Well it would start around eight o'clock.

DW: And then how late would it go?

CG: Four.

DW: Four. Did the children generally bring their lunch with them?

CG: If they had their lunch they brought it because there wasn't any other way to get it or anything like that. And lots of times they didn't have any money to buy it or anything like that so [unintelligible].

DW: Can you remember any stories that your father told about the old schools?

CG: [unintelligible]

DW: That sounds like a fascinating experience to go around to all the, how did they people accept him? Were they friendly to him, the mountain people?

CG: Oh yeah. Lots of those places he would stay all night and he said they would give you the best bed in the house and give you the food that they had.

DW: I've always found this to be true, I think it's so true how different friends are so hospitable you know.

CG: He said he woke up many a morning by golly and shoved the cover back and shoveled snow along with it. (laughter)

DW: (laughter) That's how we felt last night here. How about the health of the people up there, did really doctors ever got up there or anything like this?

CG: Well [unintelligible].

[tape break 35:18-35:22]

CG: I may not be very informative—

DW: Oh I think so. [unintelligible] my goodness. How many students or people would be in one of these mountain schools generally?

CG: Oh sometimes they wouldn't have over eight or ten?

DW: Did they generally have desks and things in there like they did down here?

CG: They would but they would have kind of crude (?) desks or sometimes makeshift desks or something like that.

DW: How about writing? Would they have pencils or slates do you know?

CG: They would use slates a lot of the time and they would use pencils too. I don't imagine [unintelligible].

DW: Did they generally have a stove in there?

CG: Oh yeah they had a stove [unintelligible] like anybody [unintelligible] have

some heat (laughter).

DW: (laughter) Oh we had a wood stove, throwing it in there all night.

CG: Well that's one thing those people, they had a crude way of living, but they were pretty comfortable. Probably they went to bed very early. They didn't burn very much kerosene or they didn't have much light or anything like that. And they would get up early and they would go to bed early. Well it wasn't any use for them to sit up late.

DW: That's true.

CG: And when they just wanted to burn the midnight oil or anything like that, they didn't have any magazines to look at, no books to read. And probably some of them couldn't read magazines; couldn't read. A whole lot of the older people [unintelligible].

DW: I guess a lot of the older people never had a chance to go to school.

CG: No a whole lot of the older people didn't have a chance to go. I talked to a good many of them. Some of them say they want their children to go to school because "When I was a boy I didn't have a chance to go to school."

DW: Do you think after the children would get out of school, they'd sort of get away from books and things like this? Or would they kind of keep the habit of reading?

CG: Well, back at that time [unintelligible] And they didn't have very many facilities of getting them reading. Now you have your libraries and you have your book mobiles.

DW: Oh they're wonderful.

CG: And different things like that. And you could write (?) in and get books and everything like that. But most people they didn't know what to think about that. They were kind of like, my daddy used to say, "They're all under the acorn tree right in the woods. He'd eat the acorn, but he didn't have the faintest idea where it came from. If it was there, he ate it. If it wasn't there, he didn't."

DW: Well that's a very good—

CG: And those children were very much the same way. I imagine if they had some form of picture books or anything like that, I imagine they would have been very interested. If they couldn't have read the caption of the pictures or anything like that, they would have looked at the picture. [unintelligible] went into the library. And the teacher noticed he came in there every day. And he kind of aroused her suspicions. So [unintelligible] goes to a certain place, takes down a certain book. He traces back where [unintelligible] a certain book. And finally came to where he opened the book to a certain page. And she got to questioning the little boy about it and "Well," he said, "on that page there's a picture in there of a bull chasing a little boy. And I wanna see whether that bull has got the boy or not" (laughter).

DW: (laughter) Oh dear.

CG: So they had lots of curiosities, just about that type and everything like that.

DW: Well you know somebody was telling me that a great, more or less entertainment, in substitute for the newspaper, would be the peddlers that came through. Do you remember—

CG: Well now they didn't get back in the mountains that far I don't know of. We used to [unintelligible] merchants in town that had very big stores and really sold [unintelligible] A whole lot of other people started out as peddlers, but they couldn't get back, they couldn't carry their backpack in the mountains over those daggone places. They were just on the other side.

DW: I was wondering about how far in they could get.

CG: They couldn't get back in the mountains very much because they didn't have any place to stay [unintelligible]. Just to show you how they were, why you don't remember back that far, either one of you did, but the Chevrolet people a good many years ago, it must have been soon after '36 or something like that. I bought a white Chevrolet. And at that time the cops were using white Chevrolets. And we had a school up in Jolliet and another one up in another hollow up there. And I went up there and I was in [unintelligible] white car. And the schoolhouse had knot holes in you could see out. And finally I saw a whole lot of people coming and looking in you know. And I didn't know whether they were gonna mob me before I

got out of there or not. (laughter) I came to find out that they thought I was a cop up in there driving that white car you see.

DW: (laughter) I guess they weren't too anxious to see you, the police. Was there as much moonshining as everybody always make jokes about?

CG: Well there some places that they moonshine. I don't know. And they moonshine after prohibition went into effect because some of those people up in those hollows they thought they were born with the inherent right, if they wanted to pick apples and make apple brandy out of it or anything else why they didn't think anybody else, the government or anybody else had any right to come in and say, "Well you can't do that."

DW: (phone ringing) [unintelligible] I think they're right.

CG: [unintelligible] downstairs.

(tape break 41:24)

(poor audio)

DW: [unintelligible] I imagine those are non-existent now are they?

CG: No most of those became [unintelligible]

DW: [unintelligible]

CG: Yeah, it has a schoolhouse in there, but now whether it has a name of the school, I don't know.

DW: Well I think we have different memories, but yes [unintelligible]. Did you make the [unintelligible] yourself?

CG: No. I got that from the highway department [unintelligible] trace those mountains [unintelligible].

DW: I'm gonna see if maybe I can take a copy out of the University of Virginia just because—

CG: Well I think you can get a copy. I think they all [unintelligible].

DW: I really think you did a really good job.

CG: Well thank you.

DW: You're extremely thorough. Your figures on the attendance rates were very interesting.

CG: [unintelligible]

DW: [unintelligible] down here I think you said eighty-two percent was the average of the attendance in the different schools. And I notice you mentioned the one up in Pine Grove, that's the one at the end of Tanner's Ridge Road there.

CG: Yeah, mm-hm.

DW: Well I try not to keep you too much longer.

CG: Well that's alright.

DW: You must be getting tired. Do you know any of the old teachers that were teaching up in the mountain schools? Anyone that I might be able—

CG: Well there's a Mr. Ed Peterfish (?) in Stanley. I think he's— (sneeze).

Excuse me. He's still living.

DW: Ed Peterfish.

CG: Mm-hm.

DW: Would anybody in Stanley know him?

CG: (sneeze) Yeah most everybody would, I don't know except the real young ones I don't know. He walked from home up to Tanner's, no I don't think he went to Tanner's Ridge school, but to Pine Grove. I know he went up there. Now I don't know he might have, Tanner's Ridge would have been too far.

DW: From Stanley?

CG: Yeah.

DW: That would have been quite a walk.

CG: And he lived probably, oh three quarters of a mile on the other side of Stanley.

DW: Cause that's about seven miles, isn't it? About from Tanner's Ridge?

CG: Something like that yeah.

DW: Cause I remember once some people told me that lived up there that they used to walk into Stanley once in a while to get some things from the store.

CG: Well I tell you, way back at that time that's about the only way they had to get out. And generally you'd see the man and his wife, and then the children would trail along behind.

DW: How many times a year do you think they would go in generally?

CG: Well just depends. I don't know whether they had money enough to get what they wanted or anything, how dire their need was and everything like that.

DW: I guess they had to go in though to pay taxes didn't they?

CG: I don't know about that.

DW: They were lucky (laughter).

CG: And a whole lot of the places in the mountains, those people, even when the Skyline Drive, even when the park came along, those people had been living on that land so long that some of them might have had squatters right to that, I don't know.

DW: They generally never filed a deed or anything like that?

CG: No.

DW: But did anyone from the Valley ever bother to go up or [unintelligible] or anything like that?

CG: Well yeah. Now the only way that they had any connection at all was that these people down in the Valley, they would have, these farms would have cattle. And they used to take their cattle up on the mountain in the summer time and graze them. And these people would take the salt and salt them. Sometimes they wouldn't. It wasn't so much a dependency. These people had to go up to see that that was done and everything like that you see. And they lived on these little old mountain places that those farmers had up there. That was part of their tract of land.

DW: And the farmers in the Valley owned it though.

CG: Yeah, the ones in the Valley.

DW: How far do you think most of the students would have to come to the schools you know on an average? Would they have to walk I guess.

CG: Well you mean way back when they went to their mountain schools?

DW: Yes, when they went to the mountain schools.

CG: Oh they'd have, they were very sparsely settled up there and they'd have a mile, two miles, three miles, something like that, than those living closer to the school. You see that one's picture that you have there, there's a school. Hoover had a camp over on the Rapidan. And I think, I don't know whether it was through him or who it was that got interested in some of those mountain people up there. And they're the ones who furnished funds to build that school. Early mountain schools didn't look that good, it wasn't even painted. Well I tell you what, we had a little school right up here at the foot of the mountain known as Forestdale (?). And I don't know, it had been built I don't know how long and it never had a coat of paint on or anything like that. I didn't help paint it, but I was superintendent of schools when it was painted. The first coat of paint it ever had. And I guess it had been built there for I don't know how many years.

DW: I noticed that really didn't look like any of the other pictures I had seen—

CG: No, no. In there, most of the pictures of the schools were in existence when I came in. Pine Grove School is in there, and Rattleburg, and all those schools like that.

DW: I guess I wouldn't be able to find any of those now [unintelligible].

CG: I don't know whether Springfield School has been torn down or not. I don't know. I think someone is living in this Forestdale's School.

DW: Where would that be?

CG: That's when you go up on the Drive, when you go to Stanley and go on up the Gordonsville/New Market Turnpike, that is the one I told you that my grandfather was instrumental in building. My daddy used to have told me that he would ride horseback behind his father and they'd pick up every rock that was in the road, from the foot of the mountain to the top. But then that road had got in an awful bad state of repair. Then of course when the park came over and everything like that it was all fixed up. Then like all roads, it was improved.

DW: Oh my goodness, just since they started this interstate program, there's been a big change in the country.

CG: Yes, there certainly has. Yeah.

DW: How about the children's clothes? I guess most of them were probably bare foot.

CG: Well they went bare foot most of the time until they got some snow, it got so cold they couldn't go out in the weather. I don't know, I expect a whole lot of them went out in the snow bare foot.

DW: Wow (laughter). Do you think the people, I'm assuming, we're talking about the doctors, I guess were there any doctors who ever made it a practice of going up there you know to kind just once in a while look after help them out and feed them?

CG: No, not that I know of.

DW: Did they ever come down to the Valley to go to the doctor?

CG: Well I imagine if they got, I don't know. That was very infrequently done. It wasn't customary or anything like that.

DW: How about were there school nurses or anything like that?

CG: No, I don't know anything about a school nurse or any other kind of nurse.

DW: (laughter) Okay.

CG: And most of the child, when the children were born, I don't know, they had some lady, some woman that lived probably in the neighborhood or near, probably two or three miles away. She came in and served in case of a doctor [unintelligible] and everything like that. Most of those children, most of those people— Of course there's not many people living in the park area now you see. Cause they have moved out. They moved a whole lot of them around here on this side of the Valley [unintelligible] you see.

DW: That's right. I read something that said about 2500 people, were most of them moved out?

CG: Well I guess they did a whole lot of them, yeah.

DW: Maybe I could go over there. Would you know anyone over there that might be interested in talking about this?

CG: No because those people, they are not the older people. They are probably the children of the younger, of the other people you see. Because all of the old people, they're dead.

DW: And I guess the young one's probably haven't kept up with—

CG: Yeah, the younger one's have gotten away and they don't know much about it.

DW: Can you think of any of the other people that were teachers up there?

CG: We had one lady from over in Madison that taught around up in there. I don't know; I've forgotten her name. But Mr. Ed Peterfish, Mr. Wren Taylor now he is dead now. He taught up there at Forestdale School. I don't know how long he did teach there. And that was over, oh it wasn't a third of a mile, a quarter of a mile from his house from where he lived.

DW: Oh, he was a local person.

CG: Yeah, he was a local person. Sometimes you ran across a person like that and they just taught because they had a job and they got more money out of it than they would in doing anything else. And then they would have a garden and other different things and they'd have a couple hogs and pigs and they'd probably keep a cow and everything like that.

DW: Would they generally be a farmer too?

CG: They might be. Something like that, yes.

DW: Was he a farmer?

CG: Well I wouldn't classify him hardly as a farmer, but he had a place where he could keep a cow. I don't think he had a horse. Later on before Wren died, I think he did get an automobile, a Ford or something like that. One of the old model Fords and it was very close to the school house and he lived there. And he would probably make his living in the summer time out of his garden and out of a couple pigs and out of his cow and different things like that. And then when he got teaching school, why he made a very good living. And both of his girls, he had two girls. Now I think one of them went out and she finished over at Madison College I think. And she went out and taught at some Indian reservation out in the West. In the West.

DW: That's different. Well it was rather unusual for a man with an education like that would stay up in the mountains. Isn't that kind of unusual?

CG: Well Mr. Taylor, I always called him Wren because he taught school when my daddy was superintendent, always spoke of him as Wren Taylor. They didn't have so much ambition or anything like that. They wanted to live and that was about all. And he made a very good living and everything. He had clothes to wear, and shoes to wear, clothes to wear. And he had something to eat and he take good care of his wife. And I think he had two daughters and if I'm not mistaken both of them

finished, I don't know if both of them did or not, no he had one boy. But I know one of the girls finished school over at Madison and she somewhere or another, I don't know she got tied up with some Indian reservation out in the West. I don't know exactly what state it was or anything like that.

DW: That's pretty unusual.

CG: Yes it is, but Wren himself and a whole lot of those people, as I said a minute ago, they wasn't very ambitious and they were willing to stay there and live because they made a very good living. They had plenty of food to eat and everything like that, plenty money to buy clothes. At that time school teachers were making round about seventy-five dollars a month, something like that.

DW: Seventy-five dollars a month.

CG: But see, you had no house rent to pay.

DW: I guess that was really pretty good.

CG: And yeah, he did very good with that. With the things that he raised out of his garden, potatoes, and he probably had a few apple trees around every place. He'd raise a couple pigs and everything. So they lived very nicely.

DW: I was wondering about the ministers that came to the different missions, were they usually local men or were they from someplace else?

CG: No, they generally came from away. I think Deaconess Hutton was from away, she could tell you. Then several people, the preachers didn't live up there, but several of the preachers, Dr. Mason, I don't know who's the head of the Episcopal diocese or something like that in this section. I think he was from down around Richmond. He used to live in Charlottesville.

DW: Do you think they were pretty influential up in the mountains?

CG: Well I think they were, yeah. They did a whole lot for those mountain folks. They had different organizations that would send them clothes and everything like that. And I'm not familiar with very many of them, but the Episcopalians up there would get these clothes and things like that and they would give them out to the needy, where they were most needed and everything like that. They did an awful lot of work along that line.

DW: Well I know Council of the Seven Mountains, which is a religious group, they still do a lot of that. I have this list her of just the things I wanted to make sure I ask you so

CG: Alright.

DW: I know I'm gonna hate myself when I get home cause I'll think of a million other things to say.

CG: Well you come back, you come back, you come back.

DW: I hope I can. May I?

CG: If you can't find me down here, you will out in the country (laughter). Come back up there and I'll put you to work (laughter).

DW: Oh I'd be glad to. Well you're just right over us by Stanley there is it?

CG: Uh-huh, yeah.

DW: What road would that be on?

CG: Well that's the one, they used to call it the Old Red Gate Road.

DW: Oh I know where that is, yeah.

CG: Well you know where Beahm's Store is? When you pass Stanley, if you're familiar with the road, you're in Stanley. Well you come on out and instead of coming to town, there's a good size filling station right there in the forks of the road, but if you leave that to the right you come on in to town. But if you turn to the right and leave the filling station to the left and then keep that main road why after a while you come out about a mile and you cross the Hawksbill Creek, the country bridge across it. One of those roads goes up to Pine Grove. That's where Deaconess Hutton lives. The other, you cross the bridge and come on up and I live in the first house on the right.

DW: Well I hope that I might be able to visit you again because I know it seems as though I mostly covered everything I have written down here, but I know that when I get back I'm going to think of more things to say (laughter).

CG: Well I'm afraid I haven't been very much help.

DW: Oh my goodness, you certainly have been. I was sort of beginning to despair. I thought I'm never going to get any information on this, you know. And it's



really been wonderful. I've gotten a lot of useful things and I think I'd like to go talk to Deaconess Hutton and then this gentleman over in Stanley.

CG: Mm-hm, yeah. If you can find Mr. Ed Peterfish out there [unintelligible]. He used to be registrar here in the county and he took that job seriously, you know why [unintelligible]. He would ask you a question, I know I came here from West Virginia and you have to register you see to go out and vote then. Why he would go through that just as methodical you know just as if he was the foreman (?) of a great service. Well I guess he was. He thought he was. But he made it just as solid as he possible could.

DW: Well it's kind of nice to have somebody take it that way. Now you just walk in, they hand you something, you fill it out and that's it. But can you think of anything that you wanted to say?

CG: Now you can vote whether you can read or write or anything like that.

DW: That's true.

CG: Really I don't know. I really think people ought to have a certain amount of intelligence to vote myself. Now that's the way that I feel about it.

DW: Well I think so too. And of course now they're talking about making it so that you don't even have to be able to read English. You can read some other language. Well I'm not so sure about this because English is the official language of our country. And I don't know if you can really know what's going on or not if you can't read it.

CG: You can't, you can't.

DW: Well I don't know.

CG: And I think you ought to know something instead of, you wouldn't classify the most ignorant man out here on par with you.

DW: Well I think a responsible citizen has to take a certain interest in the government and know what it's about and otherwise it's just like going in—

CG: Like there's a whole lot of people who don't give a kitty (?) or anything like that.

DW: Well I would think it's your duty to know who they different people are and how to vote. And if you have bad government, you only have yourself to blame for it because you're supposed to know enough about it, but some people just go in and just push any button they see and don't know what they're doing or anything so.

CG: [unintelligible] vote for or anything like that.

DW: And that's how we got so much bad government I think.

CG: I really don't know. Sometimes I get very much alarmed myself, I don't know. It's not going to affect us older ones, but the younger ones come on it is going to affect.

DW: Well sometimes you feel too that now the government's getting so big no matter what you do it doesn't make any difference. You can't have any effect on them anymore.

CG: Well everybody feels like that, you can't. But if everybody felt the other way, well then they could (laughter).

DW: (laughter) I guess you're right. I still think our right to write congressmen, that's how [unintelligible].

CG: Well you know there's a whole lot of people today they don't know who the congressmen is, they wouldn't know who to write to. They'd have to ask somebody else.

DW: Well I know, I sometimes, my mother she always calls up the congressmen's office (laughter). And she doesn't take any run around. She says, "Never mind. I'm paying my taxes. I wanna talk to him." (laughter) And nine times out of ten, she finally ends up talking to him. Well listen we don't wanna keep you any longer, I think—

CG: Well the trouble with our government today is I think that we have that it is made up—

[End audio file, 01:01:07 min.]

End of Interview

Cecil Graves, 5-10-1966  
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